

DOWNTOWN RAILROAD CROSSING TASK FORCE

January 30, 2006
Ablondi Room
Framingham Town Hall
7:00 PM

MINUTES

Attendees: John Stasik, Kathy Bartolini, Ann Welles, Peter Sellers, Bill Sedewitz, John Steacie, Lloyd Kaye, Gerald Couto, Tom Branham, Chris Ross, Ted Welte, Harold Weaver, Robert O'Neil, John Freitas, Ron Isaacson, Chris Walsh, Ed Bates (for Pam Bathen), Steven Trask, Paul Matthews, Gene Cassidy, James Kubat, Morton Shuman, Tom O'Neil, Gary Chekedel, Joel Winett, Anthony Miceli

Staff: Jay Grande, Lily Pollans.

Intern: Jeremy Shaw

John Stasik called the meeting to order at 7:10.

I. Introduction

- a. John introduced Jeremy Shaw, an intern from MIT who will be assisting with project and providing urban design analysis.
- b. Handouts
 - i. Assignment
 - ii. Background articles
 - iii. Public Comments Document
- c. State Transportation Plan Funding Announcement: John announced that the 126/135/Railroad intersection project is already in the 2030 Regional Transportation Plan, thus alleviating the importance of the April 1 deadline to have a specific recommendation to the MPO. The details of the project are not included in the plan, so Framingham still has some time to develop a set of suggestions for the intersection. This gives the group a larger window of time (but not unlimited time).
- d. Breakout Sessions: During the first part of the breakout session, the groups should discuss their impressions and observations of their site. This is an opportunity for everyone to express their ideas and comments. The groups should then discuss whether the original five criteria were effective in evaluating the options, after having observed the conditions of each bypass option. As a final step, each group should identify additional criteria that should be incorporated into Study process, in order to better inform future evaluation and discussion. Finally the groups will reconvene and summarize their discussions for the Task Force.
- e. Next Steps: By the February meeting, each member should visit all of the bypass Routes that they haven't already examined. In addition, planning staff will develop and evaluative matrix that lists all of the alternatives and the

criteria from the first Rizzo report, in addition the criteria that are identified in the breakout groups. Task Force member should use the matrix to evaluate each option according to the listed criteria. The matrices will serve as the jumping off point for more detailed discussions of the options in March in April. **An assignment will be sent to Task Force Members.**

Jay Grande asked if there will be an opportunity to comment on options from other groups. John Stasik confirmed that the March and April meetings will be open discussions where everyone will have the opportunity to comment on all options.

Gene Cassidy noted that he has archived all the comments related to the 126/135 intersection from Frambors and offered to submit them to the Planning Staff to include with the public comments document. Gene then asked if it would be possibly to get the report online so that it would be available to the public. Kathy Bartolini stated that she would see what could be done to get the report digitized. Tom Branham commented that it might be hard to get the report online due to the size of the document. James Kubet volunteered to scan the document, as a start.

- f. Minutes: Tom Branham noted that his name was missing from the list of Group 2 members in the December 19 minutes. John Steacie moved to approve minutes with edits. Ron Isaacson seconded. All present voted in favor.

II. Break Out Sessions

a. Group 1—Central Underpass options

i. Observations

1. The cycle of the traffic light at 126 & 135 currently out of sync, causing major delays—solving this problem should be a short-term goal. This is currently being explored by Rep. Blumer and the MBTA.
2. What are the impacts of by-pass routes on Bishop Street?
3. A lot of northbound traffic, from various sources, is funneled to the intersection of 126 and 135. Will this method of separation be enough to unclog the funnel?
4. Red Light signal should be placed in the tunnel to protect pedestrians where the cars surface.
5. The Colander in place of a funnel analogy should be considered, rather than relying solely on the underpass, there may need to be several holes for traffic to filter through, rather than just one big one.
6. Winter St. and Fountain Street—could be used as bypasses to spread the traffic out.
7. How do we define a healthy amount of traffic for downtown?
8. What effect will construction have on downtown?

9. Signage: there is no signage downtown to effectively direct traffic to major destinations—the turnpike, Route 9.
10. How much of the traffic really is straight through and how much is local? How could we get this information.
11. Kathy Bartolini noted that the downtown destination traffic was about 40%, and pass through traffic 60% at peak times. Mid-day traffic is primarily headed to downtown.
12. Is there an advantage to having two underpasses? It might just move downtown towards Franklin street, potentially stimulating the development of retail on Franklin. Is that what we desire? Does two underpasses mean 2 x \$50 million??

ii. Criteria

1. The original five criteria all highlight important issues and should be maintained.

iii. Criteria Changes:

1. How can the group determine the relative weight of each criteria in the evaluation of different options? Is there a hierarchy of criteria, or does each situation require a different determination about which criteria is the most important?
2. Design considerations need to be incorporated into the evaluation. How are these options going to work and what will their impact be on the built environment of downtown?

b. Group 2—West Bypass Options

i. Observations

1. The streets are very narrow, and the built environment will be very restrictive of road widening. The street network also has a very fine grain, and there are many 90° turns that would prevent traffic from flowing smoothly along these routes.
2. Without origin/destination data it will be very hard to determine if these bypass routes would actually be helpful. For instance, these routes will not really help people traveling north for the Turnpike.
3. The Western bypass routes keep all traffic in downtown, even if it moves some of it off Concord Street.
4. There is a high concentration of municipal buildings, cultural facilities and services (such as the hospital) in this neighborhood that would be disrupted by these bypass routes.
5. Using Lincoln Street could inhibit ambulance access to the MetroWest Medical Center
6. A new congestion point will be created on Union Ave
7. Both termini on these routes would require major realignments and significant takings

8. The rail switching yard prevents access to Farm Pond and limits bypass options
9. The one-way options mean two crossings over Union Ave
10. The cost to the neighborhood will outweigh the potential benefits of the bypass.
11. Downtown has a lot of pedestrian traffic that needs to be protected from interaction/conflict with auto traffic. This option might take traffic away from Concord street, but it still keeps traffic in a high pedestrian area.
12. The density of West bypass neighborhood might signal strong political opposition to using these routes.
13. The cost will be very high—all the bypass options call for significant work over a very long distance of roadway.
14. These options don't address the regional traffic that is turning onto 135 from Concord, or turning from 135 onto Concord.
15. There are already bypass routes that have developed organically. The Task Force should observe where people are making their own downtown by-passes and formalize and reinforce these alternatives through signage or minor roadway adjustments
 - a. Bishop Street
 - b. Mount Wait
 - c. Fountain Street

ii. Criteria

1. There is a pressing need for better evaluation of origin and destination data on the traffic that the bypasses are meant divert. Are people heading to Route 9? To the Route 90?
2. Evaluation of construction impacts
3. How do we measure construction impacts?
4. Timeline for completion
5. Environmental Impacts
6. Historic Preservation/Urban Design issues should be included
7. Land Acquisition and the number of properties effected.
8. Impacts on pedestrian environment (positive and negative)
9. How well does the option accommodate truck traffic
10. How well does the option address the various "traffics"---local, regional, commercial, etc.

c. Group 3—East Bypass Options

i. Observations

1. CSX owns the land parallel to the property line
2. All alternate bypasses drop traffic right downtown
3. The easternmost bypass does not affect as many houses as much as other east alternatives. E2 and E3 would have big impacts on tightly woven, small-lot residential neighborhoods.
4. Will require an over or underpass to get over the rail feed line
5. Determine destination of cars and do both east and west bypass
6. Create new access road to the Pike near TJX
7. Drop Speen Street under Hartford Street in Natick?
8. Traffic is an all day problem, not just a peak-time problem
9. Traffic should go through Natick
10. Tie something in with the new mall traffic improvements now
11. Weight limits on downtown roads need to be lifted (Bishop Street)
12. Should Concord Street be residential or commercial?
13. Could Concord Street be a divided boulevard?
14. Bishop Street residents would be angrier than Hartford residents about a bypass through their neighborhood
15. Blandin/Beaver Street could be an option to send people East on 135 to Speen Street
16. Western bypass not as straight as the East Bypasses
17. Pearl Street should not get increased traffic volumes
18. Don't give up new intersections to congestion
19. Everit Street should be considered for a bypass to bring cars back to Concord. It has fewer residential abutters.
20. Frederick too narrow, and with Arcade it will become one-way
21. Four miles of new road could be redone at the same cost of the underpass (\$50mil)
22. It will be cheaper to do existing roads
23. The underpass would mean two years of disruptive downtown construction
24. Housing Authority has land on Everit as does LifeLine
25. Adessa is not the cause of the traffic problem, but better control of the car-haulers could help alleviate some congestion
26. On-Street parking should be prohibited on Concord from Waverly Street to Route 9.
27. Eliminate on-street parking Irving Street to 135.
28. E-1 is the most feasible

- a. Possibly cross 135 east of Dennison and go over Clarks Hill
- 29. Could go around the edge of Mary Dennison park without ruining the park
- 30. Need to evaluate the real economic impacts of bypass options on downtown stores. How far away from the Central Business District can you divert traffic before you see a negative impact on downtown businesses
- ii. Criteria
 - 1. Downtown access is an important criteria
 - 2. Neighborhood impacts should be about minimizing impacts rather than having no impacts
 - 3. Need to prioritize minimizing disruption while there is any construction
 - 4. Economic Revitalization
 - 5. Traffic capacity and safety improvements
 - 6. Cost Effectiveness
 - 7. Environmental Impacts
 - 8. Decrease the aesthetic impacts of the Railroad and improve urban design throughout the downtown area
 - 9. Look at the project with the larger urban issues in mind.

Kathy Bartolini stated that staff would compile discussion notes and send them around to the Task Force, along with a revised set of criteria, blank matrixes to give task force members a chance do independent evaluation, blank maps to allow members to map new bypass ideas, and satellite photos or pictography of downtown area.

Tom Branham moved to adjourn. Gary Chekedel seconded. Meeting adjourned at 9:25.